

For discussion on
11 May 2020

**Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services
Social Welfare Support Services for Street Sleepers**

Purpose

In accordance with the suggestions of some Members, the Panel on Welfare Services has invited the Government to attend its meeting on 11 May 2020 to brief Members on the social welfare support services for street sleepers provided by the Social Welfare Department (SWD). In response to Members' suggestion, this paper provides relevant information for reference.

Background

2. Street sleeping is a complex social problem, involving policies and work of various bureaux and departments. Concerned government departments and local offices have been in close collaboration to assist street sleepers in helping them to quit street sleeping as soon as possible. SWD is particularly mindful of the personal welfare needs of street sleepers, and has been providing relevant social welfare support services for them through various means.

Social Welfare Support Services Provided for Street Sleepers

Integrated Services Team for Street Sleepers

3. Since 2004, SWD has been providing subventions to Salvation Army, St. James' Settlement and Christian Concern for the Homeless Association to each operate an Integrated Services Team for Street Sleepers (IST). The ISTs provide street sleepers with integrated services, including day and late-night outreaching visits, counselling, employment support/guidance, service referrals, personal care (e.g. bathing, haircut and meal arrangement, etc.), emergency shelter / short-term accommodation, and emergency fund to cover various expenses (e.g. short-term payment of rent and living costs, rental deposit and other

removal expenses), etc. Through the provision of a wide range of support services, the ISTs aim to address the emergency needs of street sleepers and enhance their work motivation and skills, so as to enhance their self-reliance for reintegration into the community.

4. During the pandemic, the ISTs maintained outreaching visits and proactively reached out to street sleepers so as to identify and provide them with the welfare services required as early as possible. ISTs would also make good use of SWD's emergency fund for meeting the urgent needs of street sleepers as and when required. SWD will keep in view the service needs and utilisation of the emergency fund, and will make flexible arrangements on funding allocations.

Integrated Family Service

5. The 65 Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) and the two Integrated Services Centres (ISCs) across the territory operated by SWD or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) provide a series of support services for needy individuals and families (including street sleepers), including outreaching, counselling, crisis intervention, enquiry and referral, etc. Social workers of IFSCs/ISCs would thoroughly assess and take care of the welfare needs of people in need so as to provide them with appropriate service.

Emergency and Short-term Accommodation Arrangement

6. At present, there are a total of 635 places of overnight or temporary accommodation for street sleepers, including 222 provided with subvention of SWD by urban hostels for single persons and emergency shelters operated by NGOs, including Salvation Army, St. James' Settlement, Christian Concern for the Homeless Association, Pok Oi Hospital, Neighbourhood Advice-Action Council and Caritas – Hong Kong. The other 413 places are provided by NGOs on a self-financing basis.

7. During street sleepers' stay in the emergency and short-term accommodation, responsible social workers will provide them with assistance including the identification of a more stable accommodation or appropriate residential care service. The hostel placement normally lasts for a maximum period of six months. Social workers will closely review the situation of each case and may consider extending the stay of individual cases subject to their specific needs, with a view to achieving a smooth transition towards a more stable accommodation arrangement.

Comprehensive Social Security Assistance

8. Street sleepers with financial needs may apply for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA). The aim of the CSSA is to provide a safety net for families or individuals who cannot support themselves financially because of old age, disability, illness, unemployment, low income, etc., so as to enable them to meet their basic daily needs.

Number of cases

9. In 2019-20, 1 423 street sleepers were approached by the three ISTs and related service units.

Advice Sought

10. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Social Welfare Department
May 2020